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MONEY WELL SPENT: INVESTING IN PREVENTING CRIME A REPORT BY THE NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

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In February, 1997, the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) released a report entitled *Money Well Spent: Investing in Preventing Crime*.¹ The report began by detailing the cost of crime to Canadian society, estimated to be between \$35 billion and \$46 billion annually. It then compared these costs with increased investment in social development as an alternative crime prevention strategy, focusing on such things as early childhood education, nutrition programmes, quality child care, family counseling, and summer camps. The report concluded with five recommendations for change.

THE COST OF CRIME

According to the NCPC, the criminal justice system is no longer a viable crime prevention strategy on its own, either socially or financially.

Canada's overall crime rate was 8% higher in 1994 than it was a decade previous, despite the fact that it has fallen slightly for the past four years. And while the rate of violent crime has also fallen of late, it increased by an average of 4% every year from 1978 to 1993, making the current rate 400% higher than in the 1960s.

¹ The report can be found on the Internet at <http://www.web.apc.org/~ncpc/work/economic/invest/index.htm>.

Violent crime among youth is increasing twice as fast as among adults, and has more than doubled since 1986.

These statistics underestimate actual crime committed in Canada: According to *Money Well Spent*, only 10% of sexual assaults, 32% of other assaults and 50% of property crimes are ever reported to police.

The number of offenders in federal and provincial correctional facilities increased from 117,571 in 1989-90 to 154,106 in 1994-95. In 1993-94, federal and provincial governments spent \$9.7 billion on the criminal justice system: composed of about \$6 billion (or 0.8% of Gross Domestic Product) on police forces, \$1.5 billion (or 0.2% of GDP) on courts, and \$2.4 billion (or 0.3% of GDP) on correctional facilities. On a per-person basis, the cost of incarceration is between \$40,000 and \$80,000 per year for adults, and over \$100,000 per year for youth.

Government expenditures on criminal justice represent only a small portion of the total costs of crime. According to the NCPC, insurance pay-outs, property damage and cash loss, medical expenses (both physical and psychiatric), lost wages, and productivity losses cause the actual annual cost of crime to increase

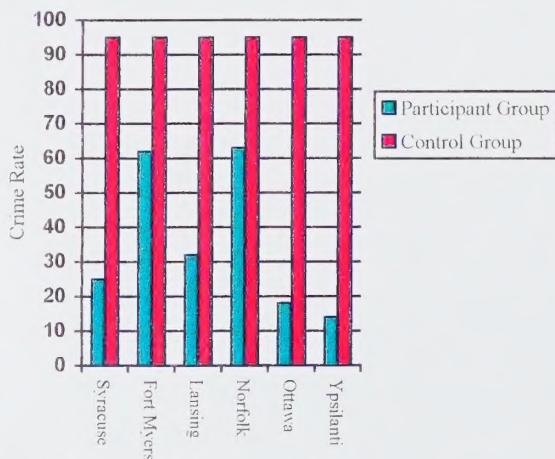
to between \$35 billion and \$46 billion, or 6 % of GDP.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

As an alternative to the traditional criminal justice system, *Money Well Spent* reviews a number of instances where well-designed social development strategies have prevented crime and been cost-effective. These include the classic Perry Preschool Programme in Ypsilanti, Michigan; the Skills Camp in London, Ontario; and the Syracuse University Family Development Programme in Syracuse, New York. On the basis of these and other programmes, the NCPC concludes that a \$5,000 investment in quality early childhood education can return over \$28,000 in dividends to society. Other social development investments, in such things as nutrition programmes, family counseling and community activities, can increase these dividends.

The following table shows the impact of selected social development programmes in various cities on programme participants compared with non-participants:

Lessened Criminal Activity among Social Programme Participants vs. Non-participants (Control Group)



The full details of these programmes are provided in the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Money Well Spent concludes that “there is ample evidence that well-designed social programmes can prevent crime and be cost-effective”(2). To take advantage of these benefits, the NCPC recommends:

- (1) the development of crime prevention projects using community action and social development methods, in order to focus on the human and economic costs of crime;
- (2) that additional resources be available to First Nations communities and other ethnic groups to enable them to pursue community development activities, given that ethnic minorities are over-represented in the criminal justice system;
- (3) that the federal, provincial and territorial governments allocate 1% of the current federal budget for police, courts, and corrections to crime prevention;
- (4) that a minimum of 50% of revenues resulting from the proceeds of crime be used for community-based crime prevention activities, and be managed by local crime prevention councils; and
- (5) that governments commit themselves to supporting ongoing research and evaluation into the costs, benefits and overall effectiveness of efforts to prevent crime through social development, and to publish the results of research and evaluation projects on the effectiveness of measures to control crime and promote crime prevention.



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